

## **WARREN COUNTY BOARD OF SUPERVISORS**

### **COMMITTEE: JOINT MEETING - TOURISM/PARKS, RECREATION & RAILROAD**

**DATE: DECEMBER 18, 2006**

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**TOURISM COMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT:**

SUPERVISORS TESSIER  
BELDEN  
GABRIELS  
KENNY  
SHEEHAN  
STEC  
MERLINO

**PARKS, RECREATION & RAILROAD  
COMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT:**

SUPERVISORS HASKELL  
VANNESS  
F. THOMAS  
GERAGHTY

**PARKS, RECREATION & RAILROAD  
COMMITTEE MEMBER ABSENT:**

SUPERVISOR O'CONNOR

**OTHERS PRESENT:**

REPRESENTING THE PLANNING DEPARTMENT:

WAYNE LAMOTHE, ASSISTANT DIRECTOR

REPRESENTING THE TOURISM DEPARTMENT:

KATE JOHNSON, TOURISM COORDINATOR

PAM MORIN, GROUP TOUR/CONVENTION  
PROMOTER

REPRESENTING THE PARKS, RECREATION & RAILROAD  
DEPARTMENT:

PAT BELAND, DIRECTOR

PAUL BUTLER, RECREATION FACILITIES  
MANAGER

REPRESENTING THE VILLAGE OF LAKE GEORGE:

ROBERT BLAIS, MAYOR

MARISA MURATORI, BOARD MEMBER

DOUG FROST, BOARD MEMBER

JOHN ROOT, BOARD MEMBER

JOHN EARL, BOARD MEMBER

DARLENE GUNTHER, VILLAGE CLERK

SUPERVISOR MASON

NICOLE LIVINGSTON, DEPUTY CLERK

TRISH NENNINGER, ASSISTANT COUNTY ATTORNEY

MICHAEL DUFALT, LAST OF THE MOHICANS OUTDOOR  
DRAMA

MAURY THOMPSON, *THE POST STAR*

DAVID CEDERSTROM, *THE CHRONICLE*

AMANDA ALLEN, LEGISLATIVE OFFICE SPECIALIST

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Mr. Haskell called the joint meeting of the Tourism and Parks, Recreation & Railroad Committees to order at 11:14 a.m.

Privilege of the floor was extended to Wayne LaMothe, Assistant Director of the Planning & Community Development Department, who advised that the meeting had been called as per the request of Robert Blais, Mayor of the Village of Lake George. He added that the request had been made pursuant to the Village Board's receipt of a feasibility study detailing the placement of an outdoor theater on property owned by the Village of Lake George. Mr. LaMothe introduced Mayor Blais to address any concerns he might have with respect to the matter.

Mayor Blais began by noting that the Village Board had not been approached with the prospect of placing an outdoor theater on Village property and this meeting would be

their first public discussion of the issue. He added that the only notice they had received, informing of the County's intent to utilize the property, had come in the form of a feasibility report. Mayor Blais said that the meeting would give the Village Board members the opportunity to discuss and respond to the idea before any further measures were taken to move forward with the project.

Referring to the large aerial photo he had brought to the meeting, Mr. LaMothe pointed out the preferred site for the outdoor drama theater; he noted that the site was located in an area that would be minimally affected by outside occurrences. He explained that the natural terrain overlooking the reservoir would be used for seating, while the ice skating rink currently located at the site would be removed to add additional space to the existing parking lot. Mr. LaMothe reminded the Committee that the same site had been suggested for the project in the past; however, at that time the property was under contract with another company and could not be used.

Mr. LaMothe apprised that Saratoga Associates was prepared to begin a fatal flaw analysis of the site if the parties agreed to proceed in locating the theater at this site. He expounded that the analysis would determine if there were any existing environmental factors which would make the site unacceptable. The County had budgeted funding for the preliminary design report which would include everything short of the construction drawings, Mr. LaMothe stated. He noted that the AGFTC (Adirondack/Glens Falls Transportation Council) had agreed to include a traffic study in their work plan to determine whether a turning lane or other traffic mitigation would be necessary. Mr. LaMothe stated that these plans were on hold until the availability of the site was determined.

Mr. Haskell noted that Warren County was very interested in the placement of the outdoor drama theater; he reminded the Committee that, originally, they had intended to place the theater in the Town of Lake Luzerne; however, that plan had not come to fruition. He asked Mayor Blais if the Village was willing to remove the ice skating rink to facilitate the outdoor drama theater. Mayor Blais replied that although the Village Board intended to remove the skating rink due to a lack of use, they did have plans for the property surrounding the site in question. He advised that the Village had developed a master plan for improvements to the Lake George Recreation Center, utilizing Federal and State grants, which they had been closely following. Mayor Blais noted that they were very surprised to hear that Warren County had returned to the Lake George site for the proposed outdoor drama theater and it was important to be certain that the County's plans could be entwined with the master plan already in place. He added that over the years the Recreation Center had become a financial burden to the Village and the master plan had been devised to correct the situation. Although all of the plans would work nicely together, Mayor Blais stated, the Village Board needed to be included in future discussions of the County's intentions concerning their property.

Mr. Haskell suggested that Saratoga Associates be permitted to proceed with the feasibility report to determine suitability of the property prior to any further negotiations. Mr. Tessier asked what the Village's master plan intended for the particular area and Mayor Blais replied a small amphitheater had been planned for the site. Mayor Blais added that currently, there was a building containing restrooms located relatively close to the site which could be used to facilitate the proposed outdoor drama theater. He noted that there was an additional building which the Village intended to move and might also be used in connection with the theater. Mayor Blais stated that the Village Board had several concerns with respect to the project, such as who would own the property in question and who would be responsible for financing the theater, and these concerns needed to be addressed prior to their making a decision on the future of the site.

Mr. Belden apologized to the Village Board members in attendance, stating that a representative of the Warren County Planning Department should have made a better effort to explain the County's intentions and answer any questions they might have. He noted that he was under the impression that these measures had already been taken.

Discussion ensued.

Mr. Haskell stated that because he was not involved with the Planning & Community Development Committee, where this topic had been previously discussed, he was not aware of the specifics of the project and he asked Mr. LaMothe to give a brief history of the steps which led to the choosing of this particular site. Mr. LaMothe advised that the Institute for Outdoor Drama had visited the area and toured two sites, one owned by the Village of Lake George and the other by the Town of Lake George, of which they determined the Village parcel most appropriate. He said that pursuant to the suggestion, discussion was held within the Planning & Community Development Committee to determine whether the site should be secured and at that time the point was made that a study should be performed to be sure that the parcel was suitable for the construction of an outdoor drama theater. Mr. LaMothe explained that money had been budgeted at that time to fund the fatal flaw analysis. He noted that the next step in the process was to determine under what terms the property was available and that was the main purpose of the meeting.

Mayor Blais reiterated that the outdoor drama theater was a great concept which should be constructed within Warren County and the Village Board was not opposed to Saratoga Associates performing the fatal flaw analysis. Mayor Blais suggested that a leasing arrangement could be negotiated for use of the property; however, he stated, they had no intention of donating the twenty acre parcel in question.

Mr. Haskell asked if the property would be leased for a nominal fee due to the fact that the Village of Lake George would be the greatest beneficiary of the resulting business. Mayor Blais replied that in prior years Warren County and the Town of Lake George had

contributed to the maintenance of the Lake George Recreation Center and property; however, that had ceased in 2005, leaving the bulk of the financial burden on the Village. Although, he said, he could not speak on behalf of the Board, Mayor Blais suggested that the re-institution of the annual \$25,000 donation might facilitate the use of the property.

Mr. Tessier advised that before a decision could be made with respect to the use of the property, a definite figure must be provided by the Village Board. He added that neither the County or the Town of Lake George would be willing to proceed with the project unless there was a confirmed location available.

Mayor Blais asked who would finance the planning and construction aspects of the project and Mr. Tessier replied that the County and the Town of Lake George would assume those costs. He added that the topic was discussed in more depth two years ago when the site was unavailable; Mr. Tessier noted that the issue had resurfaced earlier in the year when it was determined that the project could not be placed in Lake Luzerne.

Mayor Blais requested, on behalf of the Village Board, that dialogue and discussion continue between the Village of Lake George and Warren County with respect to the project.

Discussion ensued.

Pat Beland, Director of the Parks, Recreation & Railroad Department, advised that there was a site available at the Up Yonda Environmental Farm to facilitate a project such as this. He stated that the site boasted an exceptional view and background; in addition, he noted, the property was owned by Warren County and included an existing access road. Mr. Beland suggested that the property be considered as an alternate site for the theater. Mr. LaMothe replied that he had visited the site, and there was too much outside interaction, such as lights and noise from Lake George, to facilitate the setting of a historical drama theater.

Mr. Mason stated that he had been involved in the project from the beginning stages and he felt the project would aid in rejuvenating the area around Lake George. He said it was his hope that Mayor Blais and the Village Board would keep in mind that the Village of Lake George would receive the greatest benefits from the placement of the theater and, in light of that fact, would not delay the project by thinking that they stood to gain a vast profit from the property in question. Mr. Mason suggested that an agreement be reached for Warren County to secure the site for less than fair market value, as the Village's contribution to the project, in anticipation of the benefits the region would receive from the attraction and increased tourism.

Mr. Blais reiterated that the Village was not interested in selling the property; however, they were willing to work with the County to bring the placement of the theater to fruition. He added that the project would be closely intertwined with the other projects included in the Village's master plan for the area.

Marisa Muratori, member of the Lake George Village Board, said that the Board was in favor of the project; however, she hoped that the Committee did not feel they were remiss in their request to be involved in the project planning. She noted that she had been involved in theater for 18 years working as a journeymen scenic artist around the Country on sets such as the one proposed. Ms. Muratori said that in reading the feasibility study on the project, several questions came to mind from both the theater and economic development aspects. She added that she would like to see that the jobs associated with the project remain within Warren County. For example, Ms. Muratori explained, the feasibility report detailed building scenery in an abandoned building which was unnecessary as there were at least two scene shops located in Warren County which could complete the work. Ms. Muratori stated that the Village Board simply wanted to be sure that the project was completed and used in the best way possible.

Mr. Haskell assured Ms. Muratori that representatives of the Planning & Community Development Office would schedule future meetings with the Village Board to discuss the project and answer any questions that they might have. He added that although he was in favor of the project, the relevant discussions had been held during a Committee meeting which he had not been a part of and he apologized for his inexperience with respect to the topic. Mr. Haskell noted that a meeting of the Planning & Community Development Committee would have been more appropriate for the discussion held.

Discussion ensued.

Mr. Gabriels stated that although the intent of the meeting had been for informational purposes, it had been instrumental in opening lines of communication between Warren County and the Village of Lake George and he pledged to continue to strengthen the communication between the parties. Mr. Gabriels added that he had not previously been aware of Ms. Muratori's expertise and he suggested that they would be well advised to include her in the script advisory committee if she were so inclined. Mr. Stec agreed with Mr. Gabriels' statement and he added that the County should continue to improve the lines of communication with the Village.

As there was no further business to come before the Committees, Mr. Haskell adjourned the meeting at 11:49 a.m.

Respectfully Submitted,  
Amanda Allen, Legislative Office Specialist